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THE ART OF DRESSING AND OF BEING DRESSED.*

By PERCY FITZGERALD, M.A., F.S.A.



SPECTACLE indeed that is almost grotesque, is that of a man who has but a few hairs left, and with the anxiety of a mother for her fading infant, painfully trains them from one side over that bare and polished garden-slope, his poll, to gum them down securely at the other. As the very precaution reveals the blemish, this is surely a rather ostrich-like attempt at concealment, but at the same time a not unamusing index of character. The ordinary "parting" of a man's hair at one side seems arbitrary, and prompted by no discoverable reason. We are familiarised to it, and do not note how unmeaning it is; though we may discover its absurdity when it is adopted occasionally by some young lady of masculine tastes and fast manners. The length of the hair is materially connected with the wearing of a beard, which is inconsistent with long locks, such as the typical artist of a romance is supposed to display. And this can be readily explained on the principle before alluded to in the instance of women's hair. In both cases, the face or frontispiece—as in an architectural building—is the important element which all the rest is to set off and be subservient to. When a beard is worn, the importance of the face should still be maintained, the chin and lips being only more emphasized by such clothing. But where long hair is supplied behind in addition, the result is, firstly, that the emphasis of the beard in front is lessened by the second "beard," as it might be called, behind, and the face becomes lost in a sort of bushy plantation of hair. A long beard, luxuriant as a Virginia creeper, such as old men wear and younger ones are proud of, is a disfigurement; it conveys the idea of untidiness or wildness. The proper way of wearing a beard is ascertainable by a simple test. Its purport is not to exhibit itself, but to ornament the face of the person that wears it. The idea is not that of a great beard attached to the face, but of a face which is ornamented by a beard. It should be of the nature of a covering, and therefore in due proportion to what it covers. Hence, if it be long, the junction of the chin and lips seems merely to abolish the chin altogether; but if it be short, it becomes a covering, such as feathers are to a bird. Hence those effective well-trimmed beards which are seen abroad, and give the effect, not of hair upon the jaw, but of the jaw made more effective by hair. Such indeed become more important than the face itself. You see but the eyes, the beard bridging over the interval between head and body. The truth is, all these rough bushy beards become thus over luxuriant through neglect. They should be kept in harmony with the character of the figure, yet subordinate to it. When we see one of these enormous beards, protuberant and reaching half-way down the waistcoat, we seem to be in the presence of some strange animal. The eyes become, not the intelligent lights of a face, but of the whole body, for this beard has covered over the interval between face and figure. The eyes are made to glare disagreeably, from the strong relief, and the cheek bones are thrown out unnaturally. The true and becoming, or rather, unobjectionable, proportion can always be found by considering that the beard exists for the chin rather than the chin for the beard. The moustache or "imperial" is a fragment of the beard; a caprice as arbitrary as the fantastic fashion in which a yew-tree is clipped in an old-fashioned garden. As regards the imperial, there is no reason why a large bushy tuft should be left upon the point of the chin, which is itself sufficiently prominent. This mode, which was much in fashion under the late Napoleon régime, was attended with prodigious waxing of the points and substance, so as to become almost solid. The eye has grown accustomed to it, but, artistically, little can be said for it. To savages of a more refined

taste, it would be as unmeaning as their circles of paint, and rings through the nose, &c., would be to us. It suggests the idea of elaborate dandyism, but it has really the effect of a thick bar across the face, and imparts a tightened, and too prominent look to the mouth and teeth. The reason of this is the hardened board-like edge made by the waxing, instead of the graduated softness which nature intended. And where the hair is dark, the contrast between the arbitrary patches of skin and the patches of hair makes the lower part of the face too prominent. A man's chin and jaw are in general so coarsely made as to convey the idea that it was intended to be covered quite as much as was the poll, especially when compared with the fine and delicate outline of those of a woman. In the case of a soldier, such as a dragoon, the semicircular moustache has a certain martial effect, suggesting an air of ferocity, especially when combined with the brass chain, that, like a strap, runs round the face. There is a reserve, as it were—an air of mystery and of importance about the mouth, from its being so securely protected, as the moustache repeats the shelter of the cornice-like shelter of the helmet above. It has not nearly the same appropriateness when under the kepi of an infantry soldier. It is otherwise with the full, stout beard the German foot soldier wears, and which certainly suggests solidity and unassuming strength to perfection. The sight of a long row of such faces, the eyes and upper part of the face thrown out effectively by this broad contrast, might fairly cause a tremor in assailants furnished with the well-waxed and daintily-trimmed moustaches.

Whiskers, too, of the true English design, are a strangely unbecoming as well as an unmeaning mode of decorating the human face divine. The idea is based on unfinished shaving, this being a portion of the beard left behind. The two bunches projecting laterally, and cut short below, can in no sense be justified, and have the effect of destroying the oval outline of the face. The "mutton-chop" whiskers, which we note in the portraits of old politicians and in the faces of some old squires, coming forward on the cheek-bone towards the nose, and cropped close, is another caprice. Whiskers, indeed, are no more than the upper portion of the beard, the rest being unmeaningly cut away. Whiskers are one of those decorations which, as we said before, if seen for the first time, would seem to one as absurd as the bit of bone through the nostril of an Indian. The wiry, stiff character of the hair causes it to stand out like a brush—an idea foreign to all that is artistic. Shaving, indeed, is equally so, as the roots of the hair result in a detail that produces a very coarse texture in the skin. Many old gentlemen are fond of cultivating a little grey shrubbery that strays over the cheek-bone, in shape like a shepherd's crook. It is impossible to discover on what this principle of depreciation is founded. The French dress their poodles in the same fashion, shaving away the chief portion of the hair and leaving only a few tufts. The Chinese and various savage tribes are partial to the same mode; and the notion of leaving two curved tufts on the right and left of the cheek, or two accurately cut-out triangles or mutton-chops of hair, can hardly be distinguished from what is equally barbarous, the shaving of the poll and leaving a tuft in the centre. The effect is at least grotesque.

THE HEAD-DRESS.

Coming now to the question of "head-dress"—whether hat, bonnet, or cap—it will be admitted that nowhere have such fantastic freaks been played, or the canons of taste and propriety been so glaringly violated. This is owing to the fact that the other parts of the dress have to be *worn*, and to some extent must correspond with the figure; while a hat or bonnet need not be "worn" at all, or even "put on" the head. It may be attached to the side, front, or top; hung on, even; in short,

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carried in any fashion save that of the hat; and follow any function save that of covering the head. It is curious to see how far this matter has been regulated by the hair. As lumps of that material are fitted on behind or worked into the natural hair, it was found that it would be idle, and even impossible, to cover the back of the head, already so effectively protected. The head being thus disfigured, even the greatest artist would find himself helpless if called on to devise anything satisfactory in the nature of a *covering* for such a head. But mark the ridiculous contradictions of fashion! As though the back of the head was not sufficiently protected, the saucer-shaped bonnet is placed on the top of the mound of hair overhanging the neck, tied on with strings under the chin, and thus becomes, not a covering for the head, but a sort of case or engine for keeping the hair on, all trim and "taut." The Leghorn straw bonnet, such as we see in the old Ladies' Magazines, was certainly ugly, but had an honest and business-like purpose, for it offered a large case behind, which covered in the roll of hair, and, spreading open in front into a sort of circular frame for the face, kept off the sun.

An artistic covering for a lady's head must be sought, first, in the practical principle itself of what a covering should be; and secondly, in some reasonably sensible arrangement of the hair. It should be something to protect the top and sides of the head, and in a lesser degree the cluster of hair behind, as a screen against dust, dirt, &c. The oval-shaped bonnets, a form which framed the face and front hair so prettily many years ago, came nearer to what was artistic than anything yet devised. A blooming face, breaking, as it were, from the snowy leaves, fringed round by the hair, the hair again fringed by flowers, was effective, and its contour here followed the outline as well as the plane of the face. The existing bonnet, on the contrary, follows the plane of the poll of the head, being laid on it like a plate, and thus tends to lessen the height. The original type was what was styled the cottage or "poke" bonnet; which again was a corruption of the enormous and voluminous article in which the present queen used to be depicted as Princess Victoria. This display of material was superfluous, and had a ridiculous appearance. The oval-shaped bonnet soon degenerated into a sort of doyley on a frame of wire, which covered the poll and came down in points over the ears, to be secured under the chin. It has finally taken shape in the present strangely-shaped things—saucers laid on a bed of hair. Bonnets, indeed, are forced to take a hat-shape from the impossibility of fitting the old-fashioned article on to the present incumbered head. It may be conceded that some of the present shapes of hats are piquant enough, owing, however, their piquancy to their having some meaning and relation for the end for which a hat should be worn—viz., to cover or shelter the head. It will be noticed what a bare hard effect a purely circular or Chinese hat imparts. This involves a principle; the reason being that the circle is opposed to the outline of the head. That of the face is oval, or leaf-shaped, while the section of the head that is nearly parallel to the ground is also an oval—a shape the hat should follow. But there is another principle which guides in this matter, namely, that the foremost point of each portion of the dress should be emphasized or marked, exactly as in the case of a building. And as the forehead, face, and hair are all thus distinguished, so the hat should display what should be considered its façade, marked by a point; nay, even a feather or plume worn in the hat betokens the same idea, for it is placed in the direction it would necessarily assume were the wearer walking, the motion forwards making the light feather flutter behind. Now a round hat has no mark which denotes the front. Owing to the monstrous structure behind, the hat is now perforce thrown forward almost down on the nose. This, though it has a certain bizarre air, gives a downward or drooping look, the forehead being half hidden and the eyes disguised under this pent-house. On the other hand, when the hat is prettily set on in the plane of the head there is an air of height, the forehead and eyes are revealed, the tendency is upwards, and of a commanding kind.

In this, as in other adornments for the head, the *purpose* must be looked to. That of a bonnet is to keep the head warm, and

perhaps that of a hat, which is a summer covering, is mainly to fence off the rays of the sun. Considering that the coil of hair protects the back of the head the covering in of this part with a bonnet might seem superfluous. Those round Chinese hats, set very far back, though exhibiting brims, are quite purposeless, as the brims are so placed as to be of no use. There is a picture of Mrs. Garrick, the charming and graceful Eva Maria Violetta, painted by Zoffany, which is perfection in this respect, and might be well worthy the attention of our *modistes*, who have exhausted every pattern. The width of the brim should, in a rough way, be regulated by its intended function. All excess is unmeaning. Tall and peaked crowns, which rise at an angle from the brims, have somehow a stiff air; the surface of the crown and brim should be one, the brim being no more than the edge of the crown a little prolonged. That sinuous "turn up" at the sides and depression in front is not an arbitrary caprice, but is justified by convenience, the portion in front screening the face, that at the sides, not having the same function to perform, may therefore be turned up. Some years ago there was in favour a hat vulgarly known as the "pork-pie," and which was monstrous in its conception, so that there were few faces that it did not absolutely disfigure. In shape, it exactly accorded with its nickname; it was *laid* on, but did not *cover* the head. As in a building, a broad and overhanging roof sets off the walls, whereas a small mean roof has the contrary effect, so the "pork-pie" developed the face to an undue degree. In truth, we find here the just Nemesis of fashion—that its sectaries are eager to disfigure themselves, provided only they obtain repute as faithful worshippers. To be "out of the fashion" is, however, to a certain degree, an element of ugliness; in other words, the feeling of not belonging to the time produces discordance. This suggests the curious paradox: How is it that the last or penultimate fashion which has "gone out" seems more old-fashioned than even the most remote style? This may be explained on some such principle as that to which is owing the fact that people of quality will be disdainful to those verging on their own degree, but studiously courteous to those far below them in rank. The fashions of two or three seasons ago have an offensive, not to say grotesque, air. The difference is of such a kind as to give an idea that the wearers, country cousins perhaps, were unsophisticated enough to mistake the old and exploded mode for the new. Hence a sort of contempt, not perhaps so much for the garments as for their being an anachronism and misplaced; but the dress of the days of George the Third is a "fancy" dress, and eminently picturesque. Another reason for this difference will be found in that respect which is always entertained for what is founded on good sense, as are most of the old costumes. On the contrary, dress during the last forty or fifty years is founded on nothing but *whim*, and commands the little respect that is paid to a whim.

The whole idea of a covering for the head should be considered with reference to the face and head, the hair furnishing a true and satisfactory guide. As the hair is, so hat or bonnet should be, to the head. No amount of (natural) hair destroys the due proportion between figure and face or head; whereas these mounds, either of false hair or of hats and bonnets, without purpose, destroy the due balance between face and superstructure. When the true system is carried out, what is presented is, the head *with* a cover; whereas, under the false system, it is a covering supported by a head; the covering has no relation to the head, and claims attention on its own merits. Indeed, it is scarcely fair to criticize the existing coverings, which honestly do not strictly pretend to any useful end, but are no more than ornaments carried on the head; and in this view it might be urged that a new canon of taste should be applied to them, they having ceased to have any relation to a useful purpose. Instead of the head being the point of honour, the apex of intelligence, which it is the function of the body to carry and be subsidiary to, the interest is transferred to a mass of inanimate matter, which becomes the point of attraction.

(To be continued.)